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PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1992-1993

Revised estimates under section 27, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Report of the Secretary-General

INTRODUCTION

1. At its forty-sixth session, the General Assembly considered the revised estimates under section 27, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) (A/C.5/46/18) and approved an appropriation of $50,381,500 for the biennium 1992-1993, on the understanding that further revised estimates for that section be submitted to the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session, as recommended by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) (A/46/7/Add.2).

2. It is recalled that ESCWA's proposed budget had been prepared at the maintenance level and based on Baghdad costs. At the time of reviewing the Secretary-General's proposals, ACABQ noted that the secretariat of ESCWA had been temporarily moved to Amman, where all internationally recruited staff have been regrouped since August 1991; and that the Secretary-General's proposed programme of work was a provisional one, based, in large measure, on the programme of work adopted for the biennium 1990-1991 and that it represented an effort to provide the legal basis for the continuation of the ESCWA's work. ACABQ also noted that the Secretary-General's estimate of $51,630,000 did not represent an exact indication of the resources required by ESCWA for 1992-1993 and that the estimates could be determined only on the basis of the Commission's decision to be taken at its sixteenth session concerning the programme of work, as well as a decision concerning its location.

3. The Commission, at its sixteenth session, held in Amman from 30 August to 3 September 1992, in its resolution 195 (XVI), approved the programme of work of its secretariat for the biennium, as amended in the light of observations made thereon by the Technical Committee. Those amendments, as presented, do not have any programme budget implications.

4. With regard to the permanent headquarters of ESCWA, the Commission, in its resolution 192 (XVI), recommended that the Economic and Social Council (a) request the Executive Secretary of the Commission to take the necessary measures to study the requests submitted by the Government of Lebanon and the Government of Jordan, as well as any other request that might be received from any State member of the Commission regarding the transfer and hosting of the permanent headquarters of the Commission, and to submit to the Commission at its special session a detailed report on the contacts he had made with regard to the Commission's permanent headquarters, containing an appraisal of the offers made in that respect; (b) decide that a special session of the Commission be held in Beirut within one year of the date of the adoption of the Council's resolution thereon to discuss the question of the permanent headquarters of the Commission; and (c) express its appreciation to the Government of Lebanon for its offer to act as host for the special session of the Commission and for being prepared to meet the expenses involved.

5. It is not possible to determine at the present stage whether the headquarters of the Commission will be transferred to a new location in the course of the current biennium. Should this eventuality materialize, the future location of ESCWA headquarters cannot be assumed at the present stage. At the same time, lower operating costs at the current location, Amman, particularly with regard to salaries and common staff costs have generated substantial savings. It is proposed to reflect such savings projected for the entire biennium in the first performance report. Such savings are currently estimated to be in the order of $5.6 million. On the other hand, in view of projected additional commitments in relation, inter alia, to late charges for costs incurred in Baghdad, and bearing in mind the possibility of a relocation towards the end of the biennium, it is proposed that the appropriation approved by the General Assembly under section 27 ($50,381,500) be maintained at the present time, although savings of the order of $630,000 are projected for 1992 under objects of expenditure other than salaries and common staff costs.